



## Editorial



# Getting on Course

**O**n Dec. 12, we lost a PO3 in a traffic accident. The Sailor had ridden to and from a ship's Christmas party in a taxi. Once back at his apartment, however, he decided to go out for a ride on his motorcycle. While headed home this time, he lost control of the motorcycle and hit a tree. The helmet, gloves, boots, and leather coat he was wearing weren't enough protection to spare his life.

One day later, a Navy lieutenant from the same command was starting holiday leave in a rental car—a 2004 SUV. He had to veer to avoid interstate traffic that had stopped abruptly in front of him. The SUV went into a spiral and flipped over, ejecting the lieutenant. He died as a result of injuries. Was he wearing a seat belt? The mishap report simply read “unknown.” Meanwhile, his lone passenger, who was wearing her seat belt, spent two days in a hospital with a fractured nose.

The irony in these two tragedies is that both victims had attended the same commandwide safety stand-down on Dec. 10, which included these topics: holiday safety, driving safety, and drinking and driving. During the ship's party the PO3 attended, the CO had addressed the crowd and stressed the need for teamwork and ridesharing to ensure all hands made it home safely.

The takeaway here is that this command was doing many good things to prepare its Sailors for the holidays, but yet the message wasn't received by everyone. As I noted at the Nov. 17, 2003, launch of the Click It or Ticket campaign, 348

Sailors and Marines died in private motor-vehicle crashes during fiscal years 2001 through 2003. That's 54 percent of all acci-

dental deaths—an unacceptable loss of our most precious asset—**our people**.

Perhaps most disturbing is that more than 40 percent of those killed in Navy and Marine Corps private motor-vehicle crashes weren't wearing seat belts. Many of those deaths could have been prevented had the victims just buckled up.

We are all challenged to reduce mishaps by 50 percent in the next two years. This goal requires leadership, commitment, and a dedicated effort on the part of everyone—from the newest member who just enlisted to our most senior leadership. It demands some changes in the way we do things, what we expect of each other, and what we accept as normal operations. One way we all can work to meet this goal is by actively participating in high-visibility enforcement campaigns like Click It or Ticket.

I would also urge everyone to take a moment as we travel the roads and highways of this great nation to reflect on the many shrines we see on the roadside today. Think about the loss of life, the missed opportunities, the wasted potential, and the broken families represented by these personal memorials. Think about how many lives would have been spared if people simply had taken the two or three seconds necessary to buckle up.

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